

Literacy Strategy

K-W-L

We know that successful learners link prior knowledge to new information, then reorganize it to create their own meaning and learning. **KWL** helps students do this—it provides a framework that students can use to construct meaning from new material. It is a literacy strategy that teachers can easily modify to meet students' learning needs at any level and in any content area.

The letters stand for the knowledge construction process that takes place:

K — What I KNOW

begins with students' prior knowledge—brainstorm and record

W — What I WANT to learn/know

students articulate their own questions

L — What I LEARNED

students record what they have learned

The **KWL** involves students acting individually or as a group. In either case, students actively participate in their learning construction as they make connections between what they know and will come to know. The teacher serves as a guide and facilitator in the process.

Often, the **KWL** strategy is set up in the form of a chart:

K	W	L
What I KNOW <i>Categories: generated from a brainstormed list.</i>	What I WANT to Know	What I LEARNED

What I KNOW: all answers are recorded; ideas bounce off each other's questions begin to emerge

Categories: information from prior knowledge is used to anticipate how the author will present and organize the information. The categories section can be used to group words/concepts into topic categories for clarification or organization, or it can initiate discussion of a different type of knowledge of expository text construction that we see in different content areas. We want to teach students to recognize text organization. For example:

descriptive organization

where categories of information on a topic are organized and noted one by one

compare-contrast

where issues/systems are compared

cause and effect

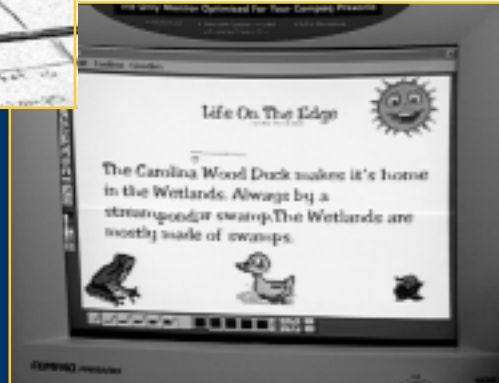
if _____, then _____.

sequence and organization

Teachers should model thinking if students are unfamiliar with how to anticipate the text organization. For example, "how do you think the information will be presented?" "What are some topics that you think we will see?" and so on.



K · W · L



K • W • L

What I WANT to learn: This step empowers students to direct their own learning within the framework of the topic provide by the teacher. Students who know a lot have knowl- edge to ask deeper questions and often go beyond the teacher's expectations.

The first two steps can easily be accomplished in a whole group setting. It is important for students to hear and learn others' ideas to be reminded of their own prior knowledge and think of questions.

What I LEARNED: After reading or researching, the student makes notes under the what I learned column. The questions that were generated in step 2 are answered and other new and interesting information is noted as well as more questions that may have surfaced. Again, it is important for the teacher to model the process initially to make sure students are capable of accurate note-taking. Information can be reviewed in whole group discus- sions. Often, there is a good opportunity for additional resources and research to take place as questions are presented that are not answered in the provided resources.

The **KWL** strategy lets teachers demonstrate to students that their interests are impor- tant, even if a particular author did not address their questions. Student questions guide the learning, placing the students in control of their learning.

Reaction Guide

	Agree	Disagree
1. Literacy strategies are really needed only in language intensive subjects like English, reading, and language arts.		
2. Learners can rarely recall what they already know about a topic.		
3. Literacy strategies that foster independent learning are best used with high school students.		